

Donna Harris has been selected as the 2015 Navajo/Apache First Things First Champion for Young Children.

The award is given to local champions who actively volunteer their time to raise public awareness of the importance of early childhood development and health. Champions spend a significant amount of time volunteering with FTF and building public awareness about the importance of early childhood issues.



Harris has engaged in awareness-raising efforts such as:

- Using the knowledge gained from Early Childhood Every Day and Write Way trainings and the tools and support to educate our community at multiple events both regionally and statewide about the importance of Early Childhood.
- Recognizing the important role that oral health plays in the health and success of young children, she initiated a Tooth Fairy program in Heber-Overgaard to bring awareness and education to the children and families. That program has grown and flourished, now spanning multiple regions and beginning to spawn interest across the state.
- Leveraging her relationships with the Lion's Club International and with local media outlets (both print and television) to inform the community of the importance of early childhood development and the role that First Things First plays in supporting the success of Arizona's children on numerous occasions including inviting FTF staff and grantees to present to Lions and School staff in her area.

We recently caught up with Harris who volunteers with Ponderosa Lion's Club and Lion's Club International.

Question: Why do you feel early childhood development and health is so important?

Answer: Positive health habits and a love of reading formed early in childhood stay with a child throughout their lifetime strengthening their self-confidence.

Q: What caused you to get involved in efforts to increase public awareness of early childhood issues?

A: My personal observation of a child in dire need of oral health education. This became a passion when I discovered the need for oral health education in local preschools.

Q: Why do you feel building awareness in early childhood and developmental health is so important for families and communities?

A: Currently, formal education falls short in early childhood. Developmental health truly is necessary for a child's overall development. Oral health education is only one piece of the puzzle.

Q: How have you seen awareness for the early years change in your community?

A: Through conversation plus flyers and personal contact our community has become aware of the many programs First Thing First offers to parents and our youngest children.

Q: How do you suggest other people in your community get involved?

A: Locate a service organization, such as the Lions Club in your community. Service organizations offer many opportunities to volunteer. Our Lions Club has two very special projects; to educate children on oral health and to provide free eye screenings. There is a saying in the Lions Club that when you join you do not become a true Lion until you have experienced an “aah- haa” moment. My “aah haa” moments are when a young child learns why brushing their teeth is so important and when a child puts on their prescription glasses for the first time.

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About First Things First – First Things First is a voter-created, statewide organization that funds early education and health programs to help kids be successful once they enter kindergarten. Decisions about how those funds are spent are made by local councils staffed by community volunteers. To learn more, visit azftf.gov.